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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IR](#) [YM](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: KUWAIT INTERIOR MINISTER SOUNDS ALARM ON IRAN;
OFFERS ASSURANCES ON GTMO RETURNEES AND SECURITY

REF: KUWAIT 137

Classified By: DCM Tom Williams for reasons 1.4 b and d

11. (S/NF) Summary: Interior Minister Jaber Al-Khaled Al Sabah told Ambassador February 16 that he is deeply concerned about Iranian actions, particularly in Yemen with the Houthis. A security hard-liner whose views do not always reflect those of the rest of the GoK, Shaykh Jaber suggested Iran is intent upon exporting its revolution and can only be deterred by force from achieving its nuclear ambitions; he characterized Iran as the "beating heart" of Islamic extremism, adding that even Palestinians now aspire to be Shi'a because they have bought Iranian "stories" about Shi'a being more prepared to "fight to the end" and stand up to Israel. Now Iran is trying to infiltrate Egypt, exploiting poverty there. Ambassador emphasized USG effort to pursue a "pressure track" with Iran; on Yemen she suggested many of Yemen's problems were home-grown and required economic and social solutions at least as much as military ones. Shaykh Jaber concurred, calling President Saleh "a leader with an NCO mentality who thinks he can buy loyalty" when what is needed is strong, honest government and firmer security measures. Ambassador sought GoK assurances on legality and intent to ensure monitoring and withholding of travel documents for any future GTMO returnees, noting that without those firm commitments the cases of the remaining two Kuwaitis in GTMO may prove difficult to resolve. The Minister promised a more formal response but offered his personal assurances that travel documents would not be issued, and said monitoring of the last two returnees was constant and ongoing. Ambassador also raised the need for GoK outreach to the Parliament to prioritize passage of pending legislation to criminalize terror financing; Shaykh Jaber said politics was hindering progress on this issue and on many other important bills, including one to criminalize cyber crimes, but said his Ministry was committed to pursuing radical extremists and ensuring the safety of Americans in Kuwait, with or without new laws. End Summary.

Iran on my mind

12. (S/NF) The blunt and outspoken Minister of Interior, Shaykh Jaber Al-Khaled Al Sabah, told Ambassador and DCM February 16 that Iran is his major concern. Iran is intent upon exporting its revolution and Shi'ism, has a gameplan, and will only be deterred from achieving its objectives - including a nuclear weapons capability - by force. The U.S. will not be able to avoid a military conflict with Iran, if it is serious in its intention to prevent Tehran from achieving a nuclear weapons capability. In Yemen, the Houthis have shown remarkable resilience - where is their power coming from? Yemeni extremists are making money from the drug trade, moving narcotics into Saudi Arabia. The GoK has been able to block some of the flow of these drugs from

Saudi into Kuwait, but remains very concerned about this. Iran is involved, clearly, as a producer of drugs and a facilitator of transit along the Afghanistan-Iran-Somalia-Yemen pipeline. Now Iran is trying to expand its influence in Egypt, seeking to exploit poverty there and infiltrate the security services.

Iranian Mythology Resonates

¶3. (S/NF) Shaykh Jaber said that the Sunni-Shi'a balance in the region is at risk and chaos could ensue. Iran is "calling the shots" in Iraq, and has so convinced the region of its stories - that Shi'a and Iran will "fight to the end" where others will not, that only the Shi'a and Iran really stand up to Israel - that now many Palestinians want to convert to Shi'ism. As a consequence, Iran has become "the beating heart of Islamic extremism." The Minister apologized for speaking so frankly, but said he wanted to clearly convey what is of greatest concern to the GoK.

¶4. (S/NF) Note: The Interior Minister's concern about Iran may have been informed by a couple of recent incidents briefed February 17 to the US Navy LNO at the Kuwait Navy Base (see IIR septel for details). In one incident, on February 6, IRGC Navy speedboats harassed Kuwaiti fishermen; in a more serious incident on February 15 and again on February 16, three IRGC Navy speedboats approached a joint Kuwait/Saudi oil terminal in international waters (located in the Al-Hout field off Mina Az-Zour), approached as close as fifty meters and lingered for forty-five minutes on the first occasion, but only fifteen minutes the second time (perhaps

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as a result of the presence of the Kuwaiti patrol boat Istiglal that was dispatched to the terminal to hold station after the first incident). End Note.

Pressure Track and Yemen Clarification

¶5. (S/NF) Ambassador took issue with the Minister's characterization of Iran's role in Iraq and then moved to review U.S. efforts along the "pressure track" with Iran. In Yemen, Iran may no doubt try to exploit the situation with the Houthis, but the causes of the conflict were largely internal and would require Yemeni President Saleh to pursue a political and social effort as well as a military campaign - as was noted in the recent London conference, many of Yemen's challenges are ones of governance. Shaykh Jaber agreed, characterizing Saleh as having "an NCO's mentality that you can win everything with money" when what is needed is less corruption and a more proactive security posture. The Minister noted that Kuwaiti Salafists are sympathetic to the cause of the southern secessionists in Yemen and are being watched by the GoK; he stated, however, that no Kuwaitis are actively involved in the fighting. Ambassador noted that some in the U.S. intelligence community believe that a considerable number of Kuwaitis are involved with Al-Qaeda, particularly in the ACPAK theater; Shaykh Jaber said Kuwaitis tend more to be sympathizers than practitioners, but said they all were being watched closely.

GTMO Assurances/Clarifications Needed

¶6. (S/NF) The Ambassador raised the issue of the remaining two Kuwaiti GTMO detainees, and sought the Minister's confirmation that the commitments outlined in the latest draft diplomatic note on oversight of returnees - particularly with reference to constant monitoring and withholding of passports - were both legal and accurately reflected GoK intent. Clarification of the pending assurances would likely be necessary given the greater seriousness of the cases against the remaining two. The Minister promised a more formal response later, and made

clear that he could not interfere with the activities of the judiciary, but said he was sure the two most recent returnees did not have passports, and characterized their level of monitoring by the security service as "so close they can smell us and feel our breath on the back of their necks."

Need for Passage of AML law

17. (S/NF) The Ambassador - as she had earlier with the Foreign Minister (reftel) - noted that Kuwait is now the only country on the Arabian Peninsula not to have criminalized terror financing. A pending law is before parliament, but Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi had commented privately to the Ambassador that the government had not made its passage a priority for the current legislative session. Shaykh Jaber responded that politics was getting in the way of much needed legislation, not just TF, but also a bill to define cyber crime. The Minister offered his assurances that the GoK is very serious on the matter of terror financing and facilitation, with or without the law, and was committed to this and to protecting Americans in Kuwait. At the close of the meeting, the Ambassador provided Shaykh Jaber with drop copies of two previous requests for information on alleged anti-American plotters in Kuwait, acknowledging that these could be "poison pen" cases, but requesting a formal response from the Ministry to ensure appropriate due diligence had been done.

Comment

18. (S/NF) Shaykh Jaber survived a no-confidence vote in Parliament late last Fall, but the GoK expended only enough effort to ensure his victory by a relatively narrow margin. The reported cost of that governmental support (arranged by a Prime Minister from whom Shaykh Jaber is estranged) was Shaykh Jaber's acceptance that KSS Chief 'Athbi Al-Fahad Al Sabah would report directly to the PM, not to the Interior Minister as has traditionally been the case. The Interior Minister's tough and candid talk on Iran, consequently, while it offers useful insight into the private worries likely shared by many of Kuwait's seniormost leadership, should not necessarily be seen as an articulation likely to result in any meaningful GoK policy initiatives.

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